

“MY CHILD has been taken.” This was the horrific truth facing Donna Hagerman, the mother of a 9-year- old girl named Amber, who was kidnapped while riding her bicycle near her home in Arlington, Texas, on a Saturday afternoon in 1996. Four days later, Amber was found murdered.

When most people would have given in to despair, Donna Hagerman turned her personal loss into a mission to prevent this tragedy from striking other families. She worked with local police and media to establish the nation’s first system to alert the public when a child is abducted. She called it the AMBER (America’s Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response) alert, in memory of her daughter

Today, 88 states, counties and cities have established AMBER alerts, which together are credited with the safe recovery of 53 abducted children.

But in light of recent child abductions, I believe it necessary to expand the AMBER Alert system. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) and I recently introduced legislation to turn the present day patchwork of agencies that employ AMBER Alert into a truly nationwide network. The legislation would provide resources for states and communities to build their AMBER systems and spread information to surrounding jurisdictions with one phone call.

Simply put, this legislation will mean that children’s lives will be saved.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in orange ink that reads "Dianne Feinstein". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dianne Feinstein

AMBER Alerts Save Children's Lives!

- Each year, more than 58,000 children in the United States are abducted by non-family members, often in connection with another crime. In the most dangerous type of child abduction – stranger abduction – fully 40% of children are murdered.



David McNew / Getty Images file

AMBER Alert At Work In California

- Nationally, since 1996, the AMBER Alert has been credited with the safe return of 53 children to their families, including one case in which an abductor reportedly released the child after hearing the alert himself.
- In the months that AMBER Alert was implemented in California, the State has issued 23 AMBER alerts, and 28 children have been returned to their parents. **Each of the AMBER Alerts concluded with the missing child being united with his or her family.**
- One of the key benefits of the system is speed. U.S. Justice Department statistics suggest that in cases of so-called “stranger abductions,” children are three times as likely to be murdered, and often within the first six hours. In 2002, a child lured into a stolen ambulance was rescued within three hours of the alert being issued. Quick issuance of alerts can mean the difference between life and death.

Protecting Our Children

Success Stories:

On August 1, 2002, Tamara Brooks, 16, and Jacqueline Marris, 17, were abducted from their vehicles at gunpoint in Lancaster, California. Shortly thereafter, the California Highway Patrol issued an AMBER Alert on the girls disappearance.

Relying on a flurry of tips from the public, sheriff's deputies located the girls and their abductor, Roy Ratliff, in a vehicle in a dry riverbed, just 12 hours after the abduction. Ratliff was killed during an exchange of gunfire with sheriff's deputies, and the girls were returned home safely.

The AMBER Alert system and the effective work of the Kern County Sheriff's Department are the only reasons those girls are alive today. Children abducted in states without an AMBER Alert system, however, would not have been so fortunate.

Nichole Timmons, 10, was kidnapped from her Riverside home on August 20. In Nichole's case, an Alert was issued not just in California, but in Nevada as well.



Nichole Timons appears with her mother Sharon at a Judiciary Committee hearing in support of AMBER Alert.

There, a tribal police officer in Nevada spotted the truck of Nichole's abductor (Glenn MacArthur Park) and stopped him within 24 hours of the abduction. MacArthur was found with duct tape and a metal pipe. The AMBER Alert enabled law enforcement to help bring Nichole home to her mother – safe.

The National AMBER Alert Network Act

Specifically, the legislation would:

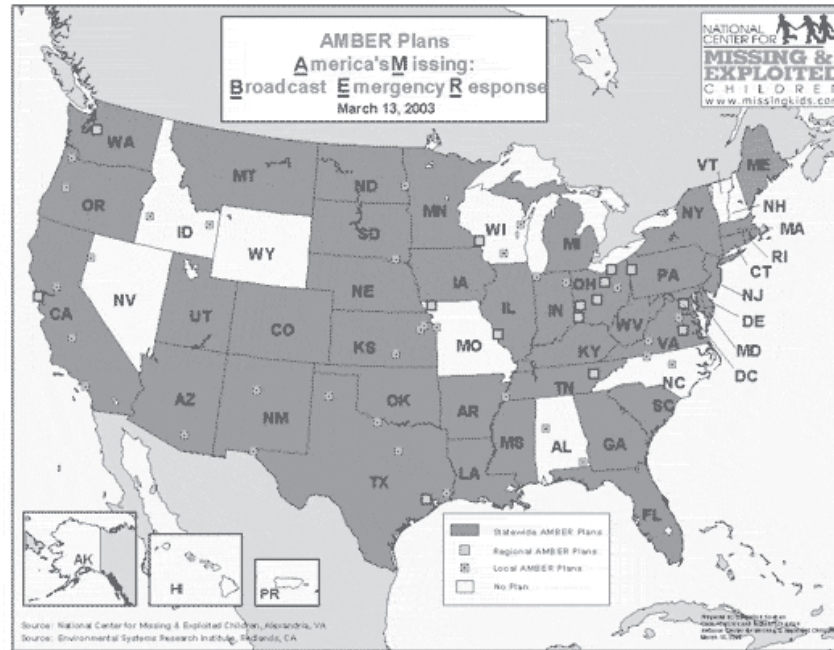
- Establish a national coordinator for AMBER Alerts in the Department of Justice to expand the network of AMBER Alert systems and to coordinate the issuance of region-wide Amber Alerts. The coordinator would consult with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and other private organizations with expertise in this area.
- Establish a \$25 million grant program to enable states to develop or upgrade electronic message boards, and training and education programs.
- Direct the Department of Justice to establish minimum standards to help states determine when and how broadly to issue an alert.
- The bill would not interfere with the operation of the 88 State and local AMBER plans that are in place today. Participation in regional AMBER plans is only voluntary, and any plan that wishes to go it alone may still do so.

On October 2, 2002, President George W. Bush held the first ever White House Conference on Missing, Exploited, and Runaway Children. At this conference, the President voiced his concern about America's youth and demonstrated that AMBER Alert enjoys bipartisan support.

Specifically, the President announced his support for the Hutchinson-Feinstein National AMBER Alert Network Act as a necessary step for ensuring the protection of children from abductors. Additionally, the President announced his intention of taking an active approach in expanding and improving the AMBER Alert program.

President Bush indicated that Attorney General John Ashcroft would select a National AMBER Alert Coordinator who will act as a nationwide point of contact and would help fill in the gaps currently hindering the AMBER Alert System.

The President and Attorney General have both stated publicly their intentions to expand and invest in the AMBER Alert system in order to promote the creation of the network that Senator Feinstein and Hutchinson are setting forth to create.



As of March 13, 2003, AMBER Alert systems have been implemented in 39 states and 49 local and regional areas.

The National Coordinator

The National Coordinator will:

- Seek to eliminate gaps in the network, including gaps in areas of interstate travel;
- Work with States to encourage the development of additional local AMBER plans in the network;
- Work with states to increase the number of AMBER Alert plans to allow for seamless correspondence between law enforcement agencies;
- Work with States to ensure appropriate regional coordination of various elements of the network; and act as the nationwide point of contact for—
 - the development of the network; and
 - regional coordination of alerts on abducted children through the network.
- Communicate and consult with the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation concerning each child abduction for which an alert has been Issued;
- Cooperate with the Secretary of Transportation and Federal Communications Commissions;
- Consult with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and other private sector entities and organizations (including non-profit organizations) having expertise in matters relating to such duties.

How AMBER Alerts Work

The AMBER Alert program is a voluntary partnership between law-enforcement agencies and broadcasters to activate an urgent alert bulletin in serious child-abduction cases.

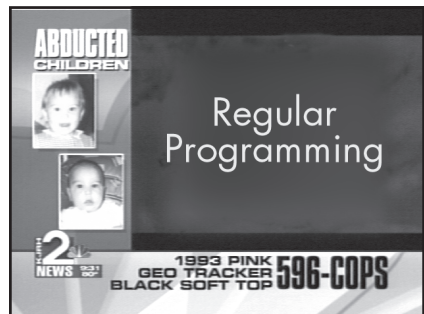
The goal of the AMBER Alert is to instantly galvanize the entire community to assist in the search for and safe return of the child.

Typically when an alert is issued, law enforcement notifies broadcast media with relevant identifying and case information when circumstances meets the following criteria:

- A child 17 years of age or younger is abducted and there is reason to believe the victim is in imminent danger of serious bodily injury or death.
- There is information available to disseminate to the general public which could assist with the safe recovery of the victim and/or the apprehension of the suspect.

After this set of requirements is met, AMBER Alerts are broadcast over the airwaves to enlist the public's help in tracking down abducted children facing imminent danger from their kidnappers.

These official bulletins include information about the assailant, including a physical description and license plate number. This information is then posted on electronic billboards along the side of the freeway as well as over television and radio programming.



AMBER Alerts utilize local Emergency Broadcast Systems to disseminate information to the local community.

For More Information:

If you are interested in receiving further information about this important issue, please log on to Senator Feinstein's website **<http://feinstein.senate.gov>** and register to receive e-mail updates, or contact:

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

Charles B. Wang International Children's Building
699 Prince Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314- 3175
1-800-THE-LOST
www.missingkids.com

The Polly Klaas Foundation

P.O. Box 800
Petaluma, CA 94953
800-587-4357, 707-769-1334
www.pollyklaas.org

Beyond Missing

Beyond Missing
300 Drakes Landing Road Suite 220
Greenbrae, CA 94904
(415) 461-FIND
www.beyondmissing.com